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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 003480

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/11/2031
TAGS: PREL TW
SUBJECT: PEACEFUL ANTI-CHEN PROTESTS DISRUPT NATIONAL DAY
CELEBRATIONS

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young, Reason 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The "Depose Chen" movement held a protest demonstration, estimated by police at 120,000, on the perimeter of the October 10 National Day ceremony in front of the Presidential Place. Other than occasional pushing and shoving, the demonstration was largely peaceful, due to both self-policing by movement organizers and a liberal deployment of some 5,000 police and security forces who showed control and restraint. President Chen went ahead with his scheduled participation in the National Day ceremony, delivering an impassioned speech that praised Taiwan's democracy and appealed for unity despite being heckled by opposition lawmakers. Ruling pan-Green and opposition pan-Blue members reacted to the day's events in predictably partisan fashion, underscoring that this is just the latest incident in the continuing polarization of Taiwan politics. End Summary.

The Proceedings

¶2. (SBU) The "Depose Chen" movement held a protest demonstration, estimated by police at 120,000, on the perimeter of the October 10 National Day ceremony in front of the Presidential Palace. Other than occasional pushing and shoving, the demonstration was largely peaceful, due to both self-policing by movement organizers and a liberal deployment of some 5,000 police and security forces who showed control and restraint. The protesters, led by former DPP chairman Shih Ming-te, voiced their continuing demand for President Chen to step down in response to corruption allegations plaguing the Presidential Office. The rally, deemed illegal for failure to apply for an assembly permit, jammed traffic on several of Taipei's main downtown streets throughout the day. Police phalanxes and barbed wire barricades, however, kept the protesters several streets away from the site of the ceremony.

¶3. (SBU) President Chen went ahead with his scheduled participation in the National Day ceremony, delivering an impassioned speech that praised Taiwan's democracy and appealed for unity. A small number of opposition pan-Blue legislators in the viewing stands wearing red, the color associated with the "Depose Chen" movement, unfurled banners and chanted slogans calling for Chen to step down. A defiant

and undeterred Chen blasted the opposition for trying to recall him and raised his voice above the hecklers, suggesting that the government should review the "necessity" of holding the National Day ceremony next year given the divergence of ideas and opinions. Playing to his independence base, Chen concluded his speech by exhorting "Taiwan" to "press forward" (jiayou) instead of chanting the more traditional "long live the Republic of China."

¶4. (C) Following their morning "encirclement" of the Presidential Office, "Depose Chen" demonstrators regrouped back at the Taipei train station, the campaign's central headquarters. Several of the pan-Blue legislators joined the afternoon rally. AIT observed participants from a wide range of age groups with families and kids making up a large proportion. Overall, protesters were in high spirits and the scene seemed like an election rally with a carnivalesque atmosphere. Organizers had stations strategically placed throughout the route to direct the march of protesters and help control traffic flow. Several stations were collecting signatures from participants to initiate recall motions against individual pan-Green legislators. Campaign leaders hope to cow the legislators into supporting the Presidential recall motion slated for a vote in the Legislative Yuan on October 13.

¶5. (SBU) Setting out from the train station in mid-afternoon, the protesters reached the Sogo Department store at 6:30 PM, paralyzing traffic along Taipei's main shopping district. Shih, who had initially planned to stay outside the store until 11:00 PM to protest Sogo voucher gifts to First Lady Wu Shu-chen, changed his mind and resumed the march, heading back to the train station around 8:00 PM. Shih then staged a sit-in on the main thoroughfare in front

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of the station, declaring he would remain there until Tuesday evening. Taipei Mayor and KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou, in a late night press conference, acknowledged that the rally was indeed illegal under the terms of the required application procedures and called on the protesters to disperse by midnight. Ma and Shih then agreed on a temporary arrangement to open up one side of the street for traffic but failed to reach agreement on full opening. When protesters failed to depart, anti-riot police moved in and by 4:00 AM had forcibly but peacefully removed a dwindling number of hardcore protesters from the street. The campaign continues its sit-in at the Taipei train station, where it has a demonstration permit to stay for the rest of the week.

Political Fallout

¶6. (SBU) Pan-Green and pan-Blue members reacted to the preceding day's events in predictably partisan fashion. The Presidential Office issued a statement criticizing Shih as "irresponsible" for tarnishing Taiwan's national image. During a press conference yesterday afternoon, DPP Chairman Yu Shyi-kun lambasted opposition party members for turning the National Day celebrations into a "farce." Yu added that KMT Chairman Ma should be held accountable for failing to restrain his party members and criticized the police for allowing limited incidents of violence to break out. Responding to the criticism, Ma said the Presidential Office had "reversed cause and effect" by blaming protesters for spoiling National Day and urged President Chen to understand the people's grievances.

The Last Hurrah?

¶7. (C) Soochow University professor and "Depose Chen" movement foreign press liaison Emile Sheng told AIT that the October 10 protest may have been the movement's last large-scale organized activity. Movement leaders can do little to generate further momentum, Sheng said, but future

events could decide whether the movement becomes violent or simply dissolves. Sheng explained that some of the October 10 protesters "wanted more radical action," and many expressed disappointment that movement leaders did not authorize more aggressive protest actions. KMT legislator and Depose Chen movement organizer Joanna Lei told AIT that Shih Ming-te is struggling to rein in PFP-affiliated second-tier protest leaders who advocated using violence to embarrass Chen into stepping down. Noting that the prosecutor's office will release its Presidential Office investigation report soon, Sheng predicted that if Chen is implicated and the pan-Greens abandon Chen to support his recall, the movement could simply dissolve. However, if the pan-Greens stand firm in support of Chen, or if the prosecutor's report exonerates Chen, more radical factions inside the movement may try to seize control, increasing the risk of more violent protest activity.

Comment

¶8. (C) The "Depose Chen" movement once again showed that it could energize a substantial number of anti-Chen protesters, mainly from the Taipei metropolitan area, to take to the streets. While the number of participants at 120,000 was substantial, it fell short of the 350,000 reached at the initial "siege" on September 15. President Chen continues his defiance and has not revealed any intention of stepping down.

Rather than weakening support for the President, the anti-Chen protesters continue to drive much of the pan-Green opposition to coalesce behind their President.

YOUNG